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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 TRSE-00 INT-05 EB-07 L-03 ERDA-05 NSF-01

IO-11 AID-05 NSC-05 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 OES-03

SSO-00 INRE-00 SS-15 NSCE-00 /078 W
---------- 019138
O 190846Z FEB 76
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3748

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 1221

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: USSAEC, TECH, SA
SUBJECT: PROPOSED JEC DESALINATION AGREEMENT

REF (A) STATE 35255, (B) JIDDA 960

SUMMARY: EMBASSY PROPOSES USREP/JECOR SUBMIT JEC DESALTING PROPOSAL SOONEST, WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS IS POINT OF REFERENCE TO BE FOLLOWED BY TECHNICAL DISCUSSIONS. DESALTING AGREEMENT WOULD NOT BE READY FOR SIGNATURE DURING SECRETARY SIMON'S VISIT BUT (A) WE ARE TOLD PRINCE MOHAMMED LEAVING COUNTRY FEB 26 AND (B) OTHER AGREEMENTS SHOULD BE READY FOR SIGNATURE AND CAN HIGHLIGHT SECRETARY'S VISIT. PLEASE ADVISE.

1. EMBASSY HAS READ ASSISTANT PARSKY'S MESSAGE AND DEPARTMENT COMMENT WITH UTMOST ATTENTION. WE WISH TO BE AS FORTHCOMING AS POSSIBLE, AND WE SYMPATHIZE WITH THE DIFFICULTIES IN CREATING A DESALTING PROPOSAL.

2. WE UNDERSTAND ALSO TREASURY DESIRE TO SIGN A PROJECT AGREE-MENT AT NEXT JOINT COMMISSION MEETING. IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT SIGNING AN AGREEMENT, HOWEVER, THE POINT FROM WHICH WE SHOULD BEGIN IS A SOUND, CAREFULLY WORDED DRAFT WHICH CAN BE A SOLID BASIS FOR A SUBSEQUENT AGREEMENT. A FLAWED DRAFT PROPOSAL IS FAR TOO LIKELY TO LEAD TO A FLAWED PROJECT AGREEMENT. WE URGE ALL PARTIES
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CONCERNED TO AVOID PITFALLS WHICH SO EASILY ENSUE WHEN

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PROJECTS ARE RUSHED INTO EXISTENCE TO MEET A TEMPORAL DEAD-
INE WHICH IS EXTRANEIOUS TO THE PROJECT ITSELF.

3. WE ARE AWARE THAT MANY SAUDI ARE BECOMING RESTIVE
AT WHAT THEY CONSIDER UNRESPONSIVENESS ON USG PART.
THEIR PERCEPTION WILL HARDLY BE CHANGED, HOWEVER, BY
PRESENTATION OF A PROPOSAL THE QUALITY OF WHICH IS LESS
THAN THE SAUDIS ARE ENTITLED TO EXPECT. IN FACT, PRE-
SENTATION OF THE DRAFT IN QUESTION TO AN INDIVIDUAL AS
SOPHISTICATED AS DR. MANSOUR AL-TURKI WOULD BE LIKELY
TO HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON HIS PERCEPTION OF USG EFFORTS.
THE TIME ELAPSED SINCE PRINCE MOHAMMED FIRST APPROACHED
USG ADDS TO THE NEED, AND THE SAUDI EXPECTATION, THAT A
PROPOSAL OF THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE QUALITY BE PRESENTED.

4. WE ARE SYMPATHETIC TO THE DIFFICULTY IN CREATING A
PROPOSAL WITHOUT A REAL UNDERSTANDING AS TO WHAT THE
SAUDIS WANT. THE PROBLEM IS, IN OUR ESTIMATION, THAT THE
SAUDIS DO NOT THEMSELVES REALLY KNOW WHAT THEY WANT--
BEYOND PRINCE MOHAMMED'S DESIRE TO HAVE AN R & D CENTER AND
TO DEVELOP HIGH VOLUME TECHNOLOGY. THE VAGUENESS ON
PRINCE MOHAMMED'S PART SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, BE A JUSTI-
FICATION FOR VAGUENESS ON OUR PART IN OUR DRAFT PROPOSAL.
IF ANYTHING, THE NEED FOR SPECIFICITY ON OUR PART IS
INCREASED BY THE VAGUENESS ON THE SAUDI SIDE. WE MUST DO
EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO MINIMIZE THE DIFFICULTIES IN REACHING
AN UNDERSTANDING WITH WHICH THE USG MAY HAVE TO LIVE FOR A
GOOD MANY YEARS. PRINCE MOHAMMED IS DYNAMIC AND FORWARD
LOOKING, BUT HE DOES NOT HAVE THE TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE, THE
BUREAUCRATIC ABILITY, THE STAFF NOR THE ATTENTION SPAN NEEDED
TO BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN NEGOTIATIONS--NOR TO CONTRIBUTE
TO A WORKABLE AGREEMENT. HE ISFAR MORE LIKELY TO SIMPLY
AGREE TO VAGUE TERMS OF REFERENCE, AND THEN BECOME
ANNOYED AT OUR FAILURE TO LIVE UP TO SOME UNSPECIFIED DESIRE
WHICH HE MAY LATER RECALL. IN SHORT, IT SEEMS THAT WE WILL
SIMPLY HAVE TO TELL THE PRINCE WHAT HE WANTS--AS DIPLOMATICALLY
AS POSSIBLE--AND THEN TIE HIM TO AN AGREEMENT WITHIN THE
REALM OF THE FEASIBLE.

5. ACCORDINGLY WE SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION MADE PARA 2 OF REFTEL,
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AND WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION TO USREP/JECOR (A) SUBMITTING DRAFT PRO-
POSAL
TO DR. MANSOUR AL-TURKI, THE SAUDI COORDINATOR, AND
(B) INFORMING HIM THAT DRAFT PROPOSAL BEING SUBMITTED AS A
POINT OF REFERENCE, TO BE FOLLOWED UP BY TECHNICAL DISCUSSIONS.

6. IF WE FOLLOW THIS COURSE OF ACTION, IT WOULD NOT BE
POSSIBLE FOR PRELININARY DISCUSSIONS AND REVIEW--WITH AN

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EYE TO TIGHTENING UP AGREEMENT--TO BE COMPLETE IN TIME FOR SECRETARY SIMON'S VISIT OR PRINCE MOHAMMED'S DEPARTURE FEB. 26. AS PRINCE WILL APPARENTLY NOT BE IN COUNTRY DURING SECRETARY'S VISIT, NEED TO HAVE THIS PARTICULR AGREEMENT READY FOR SIGNATURE BECOMES LESS PRESSING. (USREP/JECOR MENTIONS THERE ARE OTHER ITEMS THAT COULD BE SIGNED TO HIGHLIGHT VISIT, NAMELY SANSCT AND ELECTRICAL POWER AGREEMENT.)

7. PLEASE ADVISE USREP/JECOR AND EMBASSY SOONEST IF WE SHOULD PROCEED ALONG THESE LINES.
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